DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 605 CS 206 823

AUTHOR Buley-Meissner, Mary Louise
TITLE The Nature of Contextual Analysis.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (33rd, San Francisco, CA, March 18-20, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; Higher Education; *Skill Development; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Contextual Analysis

ABSTRACT

Work with 12 students in a basic writing class led to the conclusion that textual analysis alone will not provide basic writing teachers with the information they need to deal effectively with student errors; instead, contextual analysis is needed, an understanding of how students compose and what their guiding concerns and basic problems are. There are six main developmental stages which make up the student writing continuum--scribal, ideational, performative, communicative, intergrative, and creative. Each of these stages may be thought of in terms of five aspects of a student's progress: (1) the relationship of his or her speaking and writing skills; (2) his or her individual composing style; (3) his or her guiding concerns; (4) his or her basic problems; and (5) his or her common errors. First and second drafts by students at three distinct levels reveal how a student can be helped to progress from one level to the next. If teachers can encourage students to elaborate the meaning of their own texts and to become more careful, insightful readers of their own writing, then the students themselves will be able to recognize and correct errors that interfere with the clear and complete communication of their ideas. (A chart of the six writing levels is included.) (JL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mary Louise Buley-Meissner
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED218605

"The Nature of Contextual Analysis"

Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, University of Washington

Last spring I began a research project based on detailed case studies of the twelve students in my own Basic Writing class. My class included native and non-native students, with wide-ranging abilities and needs. Some were learning English as a second language; others were learning English in its formal written dialect. All were attempting to master what Shaughnessy, Hartwell, Bartholomae and others have recognized as "the print code."

Originally, my concern was to find out how I could get my students to look carefully at their own writing. More specifically, I wanted to know whether they could learn to perceive and to control sentence-level errors in their writing. In some cases I thought it might be possible to help my students completely eliminate the errors from their work in my class.

To help my students gain a new, sharper perspective on their problems in writing, I used many different procedures. These included frequent personal conferences, tape recordings of students reading their compositions aloud, lengthy error analyses of their compositions, miscue analyses, and close examination of my students' rough-draft to final-draft composing processes. As a result, I was able to mine a rich source of information about the problems Basic Writers face in learning to compose. And I was

CS206823

able to help my students look more carefully at their writing. Some of them did, in fact, gain remarkable control over their errors.

But the most important discovery of my research was not that my students could learn to perceive their texts more clearly. That happened, I think, mainly because something of even greater significance happened--I learned to perceive the contexts of their writing more clearly, fully, and comprehensively. I learned to look at their writing in a new way--in its linguistic and rhetorical context--which made me see their errors in a much different way than I had before.

These are my most significant findings:

First of all, development in writing does not mean the gradual disappearance of error. It does mean that different kinds of error tend to appear at different stages of development.

Second, students at different levels of development tend to conceptualize and approach the composing situation itself in different ways. As a result, they tend to be preoccupied with different kinds of error.

Third, the key to perception and control of error--at any level of development--is the elaboration of meaning. Indeed my case studies suggest that unless students concentrate on the elaboration of meaning, it is unlikely that they will be able to gain control of the writing situation--or their errors.

It has become clear to me that textual analysis alone will not provide the information Basic Writing teachers need to deal effectively with the errors in their students' work. For their purposes, contextual analysis is essential. To understand students' errors, they need to understand how students compose, what their guiding concerns and basic problems are.

In this report I would like to explain what a contextual analysis of writing involves by reference to the attached chart, which outlines my own model of development in learning to write. The model is based on what I have learned from observing my own students' writing behavior, but I believe it is applicable to many other students and classes.

Essentially, contextual analysis depends on the teacher being aware of the developmental level a student has reached in learning to write. As the top line of the chart indicates, this involves understanding five aspects of the student's progress:

1) the relationship of his speaking and writing skills--specifically, whether the student tends to separate or productively connect those skills in his written work

2) his individual composing style--how he typically approaches any writing task

3) his guiding concerns--namely, what he perceives as his most

important concerns in meeting the requirements of the writing situation

4) his basic problems--the main difficulties that prevent him from communicating his ideas fully and clearly

5) his common errors--mistakes that are integrally related to the meaning the student is trying to develop in his text.

Listed on the left hand side of the chart are the six main stages of development: scribal, ideational, performative, communicative, integrative, and creative. I will be describing these stages in terms of general tendencies, priorities, and difficulties that characterize students' writing behavior. I realize, of course, that such generalizations may not apply exactly to individual students. But my purpose here is to show major stages in development, not to analyze all the complexities of any one composing style.

It also is important to recognize that each stage marks an important point on a developmental continuum. Individual students will move along that continuum in different ways. One student, for example, may remain at the scribal level for a long time before he masters the skills which will enable him to advance to the ideational level. Another student may advance rapidly from the scribal and the ideational to the performative level.

Finally I would like to point out that the six stages listed on the chart are related by hierarchic integration. That means the skills developed in

lower stages are integrated with the skills developed in higher stages as a student gains control of his own composing processes. In the simplest terms, then, development in writing is a process of actively incorporating old skills with new skills.

Many teachers and researchers consider only the last column on the chart, "common errors," when they look at the work of Basic Writing students. Some do consider the column next to that, "basic problems." But few look at errors in the complete framework presented here. As I now describe each of the developmental levels, I hope you will see why placing errors in that framework can be a starting point for dealing effectively with them.

Scribal Level

At the scribal level, a student tends to completely separate the functions of speaking and writing. He is so unsure of his writing skill, that it does not at all approximate his speaking skill. His composing style is truncated. He tends to avoid writing as much as possible, forcing himself to write only when a deadline is impending. Then he has to concentrate very hard simply to get enough words on a page to fill out a few lines. As a result, it is obvious that none of his ideas are developed in any detail. In fact, sometimes it may be hard to find even one idea worth developing. Misspellings, missing inflections, and missing words are typical in his writing.

What the teacher has to realize is that very few of this student's writing behaviors are automatized. Low-level concerns--handwriting and punctuation, for example--draw his attention away from high-level concerns. Consequently his writing tends to be filled with errors and empty of meaning.

Ideational Level

At the ideational level, a student tends to consolidate speaking and writing functions. Usually he writes as he talks, following informal, conversational patterns of expression. His composing style is free-flowing. That is, as long as ideas come easily to mind, he can keep writing. When they do not come easily, he simply stops writing.

Often it is hard to follow the organization of a students' thoughts at this level. He does not have much trouble getting words on the page, but he does have trouble structuring sentences. Fragments, run-ons, and splices show that he is unsure of how to mark the syntactic boundaries of his ideas.

Performative Level

For many Basic Writing students, reaching the performative level is a hard-won achievement. By that stage of their development, they have learned that speaking and writing can be differentiated in terms of purpose, convention, and context. They are ready to move from a one-

stage to a two-stage process of composing: they want to edit their compositions after writing them. In fact, they want to use as many conventions as necessary to be correct.

This preoccupation with error, however, often results in completely lifeless writing. For example, sentences will be listed rather than connected, without any development of meaning from the first to the last. Often, too, students at this level will choose to be consistent by using the same forms over and over. Consequently, they may use one sentence pattern or one verb tense all through an essay, even when the discourse context calls for a different pattern or tense.

At this level, students are performing for the teacher, not writing for themselves.

Communicative Level

The goal of many Basic Writing teachers is to help their students reach the communicative level. Here students are able to incorporate a personal "voice" in their writing. They can shift between formal and informal registers. They can address different audiences in appropriate ways. They want to meet the needs of their readers, so they incorporate more deliberate planning when they compose. Frequently, however, students at the communicative level still depend on a 'shared' context to make their ideas clear. That is, they expect their readers' active collaboration in producing the meaning of the text. Therefore, they may need

help in learning to control point of view and clarify extra-textual references.

Integrative

At the integrative level of development, students are genuinely self-engaged. They are aware of themselves as writers with specific choices to make about the roles they will assume, the audiences they want to reach, the structures they can use in presenting their ideas, and so on. To deal with all their concerns, they have to extend the composing process to include more deliberate revision. They want to gain control over the writing situation in order to satisfy themselves as well as their readers.

Here a common problem is that the student's linguistic skills are not equal to his rhetorical sophistication. He may know very well what he wants to say and what ideas should be emphasized in his writing. But he may be uncertain about how to express his ideas precisely. As a result, he may bend and even break his syntax to fit in the meaning which is important to him.

In this situation, the teacher needs to show the student what his syntactic options actually are.

Creative Level

Basic Writing students are capable of reaching the creative level of

development. At this point, having gained control over a wide range of forms and functions in composition, a writer has enough confidence to use writing for exploring ideas. He realizes that writing does not always have to be a product of thought. He recognizes that writing can be an integral part of thought.

Like the students at all the other levels of development, a student at the creative level can present his teacher with real challenges. Often, for example, he will have a tendency to expand rather than focus ideas. And he may chain his sentences together, linking one to another as he discovers and follows new directions in his thoughts. His teacher then will need to help him go back and find the places where his readers may get lost.

The most important point to recognize in using this model is that at every level of development, the teacher can encourage the student to elaborate the meaning of his text.

To show how this can be done with individual students, I now will refer to the attached excerpts from my students' compositions. The excerpts show first-draft and second-draft work by students at three distinct developmental levels. The first student is at the scribal level, moving toward the ideational; the second is at the performative level, moving toward the communicative; and the third is at the integrative level, moving toward the creative. Each student wrote his second draft after I had a conference with him to discuss four basic concerns: his intentions

in the assignment; the procedures he followed to complete it; the problems he encountered; and his perceptions of the work. Generally I encouraged my students to focus on what seemed to be interfering with the clear communication of their ideas. What I have underlined in the excerpts are passages that highlight revisions made after the conferences.

As you look at the first student's work, you can see that his basic problem is the inability to develop even one idea in any detail. Words are missing and misspelled, but I did not mention those errors in our conference. If you could see his handwritten work, you would immediately realize how painful it was for him simply to get the words on the page. In conference the student first wanted to talk about all his mistakes. As he said, "I betcha every one of them words is wrong."

My main concern, however, was getting the student to rethink his entire approach to composing, so he could bring more of his real communication skills to bear on the situation. I began by pointing to the last three words--<u>agressive</u> (sic), <u>deticated</u> (sic), and <u>optimist</u>--and asking him to explain what he meant by them. As he talked, we both realized that he had more than enough ideas to make an interesting essay. My advice to him was: think some more about how you and grandfather are alike and then tell me about it on paper. Furthermore, I told him not to worry about his handwriting or his spelling or his punctuation, but to concentrate instead on making the meaning of the last three words of his essay clear.

As you can see, in his second draft the student was able to be more

specific about his ideas. The words aggressive, dedicated, and optimist do start to take on meaning. The student does seem to be taking more control of the writing situation. And, as a direct result, he does seem to be gaining more control over certain errors. He does not omit any words, he misspells only one, and he is able to use a sophisticated form of punctuation, quotation marks, to correctly indicate direct speech.

I was pleased by this revision because the improvements were ones the student wanted to make. When he let himself stop thinking about mistakes, he did think more about meaning.

The second student's work demonstrates how hard some Basic Writers concentrate on not making any mistakes--even if they end up not making any sense at all.

As you read the student's first draft, you will notice how careful she is to keep herself out of her writing. She begins with broad generalizations in an attempt to follow a standard comparison/contrast pattern. "My father and I are different and similar in various ways. There are only two basic aspects I can think of." When she shifts to something specific, mentioning "customs or traditions," she immediately qualifies her remarks: "I must admit the latter is a generalization. Everyone was brought up in some different way." It seems as if she deliberately excludes any considerations that might complicate the straightforward, correct presentation of her ideas.

In conference the student wanted to talk about sentence structure, which she really did not have any major problems with. Her basic problem was that preoccupation with error interfered with her ability to develop any meaning in her composition.

In conference I encouraged the student to re-compose the assignment as if she were writing a letter to a close friend. That resulted in a completely different treatment of her subject. In fact, when you look at the second draft, you will see that the student came to an entirely different conclusion when she allowed herself to express--rather than censor--her own feelings.

Her writing style itself also is more interesting in the second draft. Without planning to do so, she ends up using a variety of sentence structures that give her work a natural, lively rhythm.

Again, I was pleased by this revision mainly because the student found a way to make her composition more meaningful--both for herself and for her reader.

In conclusion, I want to re-emphasize that if students are encouraged to elaborate the meaning of their texts, it is likely that they will look more closely and carefully at what they have written. They will gain practice in objectifying their texts. And in the process of becoming more careful, insightful readers of their own writing, it is likely that

they will be able to recognize and correct the errors which most deserve their attention--namely the errors which interfere with the clear and complete communication of their ideas.

"The Nature of Contextual Analysis"

Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, University of Washington

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL	Rel. of Speaking & Writing Skills	Composing Style	Guiding Concerns	Basic Problems	Common Errors
SCRIBAL	separated	truncated	getting words on paper	insufficient content	misspellings missing inflections missing words
IDEATIONAL	consolidated	1-stage	transcribing ideas	inexplicit reasoning	fragmented and/or spliced sentences
PERFORMATIVE	differentiated	2-stage	using necessary conventions	preoccupation with error	disconnected sentences--consistent but incorrect tense
COMMUNICATIVE	unified	3-stage	recognizing needs of reader	dependency on shared context	shifting point of view --ambiguous references
INTEGRATIVE	systematically integrated	elaborated	gaining control of writing situation	need for more fully developed comp. skills	bent and/or broken syntax
CREATIVE	refined and expanded	exploratory	finding meaning through writing itself	tendency to expand rather than focus ideas	chained syntax

"The Nature of Contextual Analysis"

Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, University of Washington

(Note: The texts below were excerpted from students' handwritten compositions. After the texts were typed, underlining was added to emphasize first-draft to second-draft revisions.)

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL: SCRIBAL ——————→ IDEATIONAL

First Draft

My Creat Grandfather David Hatton and myself are different but we have many things in common. The older my Great Grandfather got, I got to know him. Everytime we were together I would ask him, "about the way of life back in time." I found out he was like me 1) agressive 2) deticated 3) optimist.

Second Draft

My Great Grandfather David Hatton died last year. Before he died he told me stories about what it was like when he was growing up. It turned out we were a lot alike. First he said that after slavery was stoped there were many people who would try to enforce it again. A black person had to be aggressive and feel proud like me. Second he said that he worked hard but did'nt make any money. A person had to be dedicated to his job like me. Third he said life was hard but he looked at the future and he thought it would be better. A person had to be a optimist like me. Most of all I remember he said, "Never give up on yourself."

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL: PERFORMATIVE ——————→ COMMUNICATIVE

First Draft

My father and I are different and similar in various ways. There are only two basic aspects I can speak of. I can present the difference between us through an example and the similarity between us through an example too. My father and I are different in our customs or traditions and in how we were brought up. I must admit that the latter is a generalization. Everyone was brought up in some different way. However, I will try to explain how my father's customs and how he was brought up with it differs from mine.

Second Draft

My father and I are so different that people do not think I am his daughter. We do not think alike about anything. He belongs to the Old World and I belong to the New World, so when we talk we always argue, which makes him angry and makes me angry too, so we don't like to talk about anything, and that means things are very quiet at our house. Sometimes I wish it wasn't so quiet. And I think he does too. If we are so different why do we act the same and feel the same?

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL: INTEGRATIVE ——————→CREATIVE

First Draft

Though it has been said mother and daughter are alike, my mother and I are different in nearly every way. We think differently, we act differently, and we value different things. Our differences seemed to increase as I was getting older. The fall of South Vietnam marked the starting point of our differences. Our family was forced to leave Vietnam and flee to America to find freedom from the Communists. I was fourteen years old then. My mother was almost forty-five years old. Little in common that we had, the conflict of two cultures, the old and the new, drove us more and more apart.

Second Draft

Though it has been said that mothers and daughters are alike, my mother and I are different in nearly every way. We think differently, we act differently, and we value different things. Our differences have increased as I have gotten older. The fall of South Vietnam marked the starting point of our differences. Our family was forced to leave Vietnam and flee to America to find freedom from the Communists. We all had to learn and adjust in order to survive in a completely different world. America--a world none of us had encountered before. I was fourteen years old then: a perfect age to have new ideas, new ways of living realized in a new culture that was soon to be my own. My mother was born and had lived in Vietnam for almost forty-five years; her thoughts, her ideas, her personality belonged to Vietnamese culture. Little in common that we had, the conflict of these two cultures, the old and the new, drove us more and more apart.

"The Nature of Contextual Analysis"
Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, University of Washington

Selected Bibliography

I. Recommended for the Basic Writing Teacher:

Bartholomae, David. "Teaching Basic Writing: An Alternative to Teaching Basic Skills" Journal of Basic Writing, 2 (Spring/Summer 1979), 84-119.

Flower, Linda. "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing." College English, 41 (Sept. 1979), 19-37.

Hartwell, Patrick. "Dialect Interference in Writing: A Critical View," RTE, 14 (May 1980), 101-118.

Perl, Sondra. "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers." RTE, 13 (Dec. 1979), 317-336.

Weaver, Constance. Grammar for Teachers: Perspectives and Definitions. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1979.

II. Recommended for the Teacher of English as a Second Language:

Chau, Tran-Thi. "Error Analysis, Contrastive Analysis, and Students' Perception: A Study of Difficulty in Second Language Learning." IRAL, 13 (1975), 119-143.

Krashem, Stephen D. "The Monitor Model for Adult Second Language Performance." In Viewpoints on English as a Second Language. Ed. Marina Burt, Heidi Dulay, and Mary Finocchiaro. New York: Regents, 1977.

Oller, John W., and Jack C. Richards, eds. Focus on the Learner: Pragmatic Perspectives for the Language Teacher. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury, 1973.

Ross, Janet. "The Habit of Perception in Foreign Language Learning: Insights into Error from Contrastive Analysis." TESOL Quarterly, 10 (June 1976), 169-175.

Robin, Joan. "What the 'Good Language Learner' Can Teach Us." TESOL Quarterly, 9 (March 1975), 41-51.

III. Recommended for the Teacher/Researcher:

Croft, Kenneth, ed. Readings in English as a Second Language. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1980.

Krashen, Stephen D. Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching. Oxford: Permagon Press, 1981.

Kroll, Barry M., and Roberta J. Vann, eds. Exploring Speaking/Writing Relationships. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1981.

Mishler, E. "Meaning in Context: Is There Any Other Kind?" Harvard Educational Review, 49 (Feb. 1979), 1-19.

Shuy, Roger W. "A Holistic View of Language." RTE, 15 (May 1981), 101-112.